

Sudan, conflict

ETC Situation Report #26

Reporting period: 01/03/2025 to 31/03/2025

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) was activated on 25 May 2023 to support the humanitarian response following the outbreak of conflict on 15 April 2023. The ETC is led by WFP in Sudan. ETC Situation Reports (SitReps) are produced monthly.

Highlights

- The ETC continued to strengthen the availability and reliability of its network in Port Sudan and other locations. On 06 March ETC upgraded the network switch in the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) guest house. Further on 16 March the ETC installed connectivity at the new United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) office in Hai al Matar, and on 20 March the ETC completed a Point-to-Point (P2P) link optimization exercise.
- On 26 March ETC completed the procurement of controllers required to adopt cloud solutions for the management of P2P devices, and on 28 March completed the procurement of a new technical Wifi management solution at a 75 percent discount that will enable nationwide user authentication. These steps aim to strengthen the management of the ETC network.
- The ETC has continued to increase inter-cluster engagement. On 16 March the ETC met with the Accountability for Affected Population (AAP) working group, the education cluster, and the health cluster to discuss possible collaboration on services for community activities.



Sudan TEC all-staff meeting. Location, Port Sudan. Source: WFP/ETC Sudan

Situation overview

The humanitarian situation in Sudan remains extremely severe, with nearly 25 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, with close to nine million in emergency and catastrophic levels of hunger. As a result of the conflict, approximately 12 million people – well over half of whom are children – forced from their homes, amidst a collapse of healthcare infrastructure, leaving millions without access to essential services.

The security situation in Sudan remains highly volatile with a substantial surge in conflict during the beginning of the year. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) maintain control over key cities in the East and have made notable advances in Khartoum. Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continue to control much of Darfur and the West of the country and have been working to consolidate control in these areas.

Throughout March, SAF have continued to build on their advances in Khartoum and following the capture of the airport and presidential palace have claimed that the city has been retaken, with reports of remaining RSF forces fleeing from the city. This follows increased civilian casualties in Khartoum from drone strikes and shelling during the month. It is reported that, the recapture of Khartoum marks

a significant symbolic victory for SAF, and the SAF leader, subsequently visited the city on 26 March to declare that the capital had been retaken.

Media reports state that due to losses in Khartoum, the RSF are working to consolidate gains in the West of the county, increasing the intensity of their offensive operations on El-Fasher in Darfur. As a result, thousands have been forced to flee to Zamzam camp, which is under siege and facing famine.

Civilians continue to be affected by airstrikes and drone strikes across the country. On 24 March airstrikes, reportedly conducted by SAF, hit Tura market north-west of El-Fasher, killing dozens of civilians in the RSF-held territory.

National telecommunications infrastructure

Sudan continues to face major challenges with its telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity services, with many areas facing regular internet blackouts and power outages. These challenges have been exacerbated by the increase in drone strikes targeting critical infrastructure such as power plants. On Wednesday, 05 February all three of Sudan's main network operators (Zain, Sudani, and MTN Sudan) went offline. Network operators claimed that the nationwide outage was due to RSF action; however, RSF denied responsibility.

To address nationwide connectivity limitations, the ETC continues to manage and expand connectivity from the dedicated one Gigabit (GB) undersea cable which provides fibre connectivity to multiple locations through a 'local loop.' The ETC has connected 16 sites across Port Sudan, Atbara, Kassala, Dongola, and Al-Gedarif to the undersea cable local loop. Additional expansion is planned for up to 21 sites in total, pending license approvals and final infrastructure work. The ETC is using point-to-point connectivity to further expand access to the ETC network at additional sites.

A large batch of telecommunications equipment has been held at Port Sudan airport since 30 October. The ETC continues to coordinate with authorities to expedite clearance and importation of the equipment.

In efforts to improve resilience against connectivity issues, discussions with Sudan's National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) have led to strategies for importing essential equipment such as Very High Frequency (VHF) radios and network infrastructure in small batches.

See the Sudan [ICT Profile](#) for more information on national telecommunications infrastructure.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC is preparing to conduct a mission to Al-Gedarif which is scheduled to take place in April once the relevant clearances have been received. The purpose of the mission will be to resume server room rehabilitation and install data points at the new WFP office. The ETC will also complete network installation at SILO in Al-Gedarif and will assess the IOM office.

Following the government's decision to revoke authority for the UN to maintain a permanent presence in Darfur, and the subsequent closing of the 'Blue House' in Zalingei, a previously planned mission to

the city remains on hold indefinitely. One ETC staff member remains in Farchana since February to facilitate coordination regarding potential scale-up of ETC activities in Darfur.

In coordination with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the humanitarian community, the ETC is currently engaging with the Humanitarian Needs Response Plan (HNRP) reprioritization exercise. The ETC will prioritize maintaining reliable services in existing operational locations and will only seek to further expand in high priority strategic locations where funding is available. Plans to establish an operational hub near Khartoum remain suspended due to the worsening security situation. Relocation plans are under review by OCHA and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS). The ETC is also continuing to engage with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) regarding the possible reintroduction of humanitarian operations and services in Wad Madani.

On 16 March the ETC met with the AAP working group, the education cluster, and the health cluster to discuss possible collaboration on services for community activities. The ETC discussed the possibility of joining education cluster meetings with the Ministry of Telecommunications to ensure a more joint approach to advocacy and government.

On 20 March the ETC met with the subnational health cluster in Darfur to explore collaboration regarding provision of connectivity services and services for communities. The ETC presented existing services and clarified that any future expansion would be dependent on the result of ongoing reprioritization exercises, availability of funding, and access conditions.

On 21 March the ETC met with partner CDAC network to discuss their ongoing project related to reducing information barriers between local communities / actors and international humanitarian organizations and encourage improved accountability. The ETC shared key operational challenges that continue to be faced and CDAC network agreed to advocate for solutions to these issues in the relevant forum.

Humanitarian partners can request information, technical advice, and access to services to the ETC through the Sudan.ETC@wfp.org email address. A ticketing system has been established to manage the high volume of requests being received.

Data connectivity

ETC internet connectivity services are available in seven operational areas—Port Sudan (39 sites), Kassala (17 sites), Kosti (one site using the WFP office premises), Damazine (one site using the WFP office premises), El-Gedaref (one site), Dongola, and Atbara. ETC connectivity was briefly impacted by an outage of the fibre connectivity link on 31 March however ETC connectivity was promptly restored once the issue was identified.

The activation of the one GB undersea cable marked a major step forward in improving data connectivity for humanitarian actors in Sudan. Following the successful piloting of connectivity from the undersea cable to five sites in Port Sudan, the ETC has begun expanding coverage to additional locations using a 'local loop.' Having completed infrastructure installations at the UNDSS office in Port Sudan, connectivity from the undersea cable and local loop project is now available at 16 sites across Port Sudan, Atbara, Kassala, Dongola, and Al-Gedarif, with plans to eventually expand coverage to 21 sites.

The ETC is currently working on adopting cloud solutions to improve the management of P2P and point-to-multipoint (P2MP) devices and subsequently completed the procurement of the necessary UNIFI and UISP controllers on 26 March. In addition, the ETC has completed the procurement of a new

technical Wi-Fi management solution that will enable nationwide user authentication. The procurement was completed on 28 March and was provided at a 75 percent discount by the provider due to the humanitarian purpose.

The ETC continued to strengthen the availability and reliability of its network in Port Sudan and other locations. On 06 March ETC upgraded the ETC switch in UNITAMS guest house. On 16 March ETC installed connectivity at the new UNOPS office in Hai al Matar, following a survey which took place at the office on 12 March.

The ETC also conducted a P2P link optimization exercise in Port Sudan which was completed on 20 March. The exercise involved tuning the P2P link of the Port Sudan sectorial antenna and adding settings to lower frequency interference and introduce more channels to the sector.

The ETC is also working to improve connectivity in Al-Gedarif, and on 06 March sent connectivity equipment to Al-Gedarif to facilitate installation of connectivity at the SILO. A mission to complete installation is pending and due to take place in April.

While the ETC was due to install connectivity at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) guesthouse on 27 March, the ETC faced a number of technical challenges resulting from access point configuration and linking the guesthouse to the WFP connectivity tower. Installation has been rescheduled to early April as a result.

Security communications

The five Security Operation Centres (SOC) in Port Sudan, Kassala, El-Gedarif, and Damazine are fully operational. In the Kosti SOC, multiple forms of communication are currently redundant due to the outages being faced in the region.

On 10 March the ETC met with UNDSS to discuss revising the number of SOC radio operators that the ETC is able to fund due to changes in funding. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will currently remain in place, and UNDSS are putting in place plans to reduce the number of radio operators over the next four months while maintaining critical SOC capacity.

As part of efforts to support the functioning of the SOCs, the ETC programmed seven VHF radios during the month of March.

The ETC is also engaging with the United Nations Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) to support their plans to establish a flight tracking centre in Port Sudan. The WFP FITTEST¹ team has been contacted for a quotation.

Services for communities

The ETC is increasing its engagement with partners to explore opportunities to scale up the Services for Communities (S4C) pillar of its 2025 strategy. The ETC is working to identify and prioritise appropriate existing 'safe spaces' that provide services to affected populations and require ETC connectivity. This aims to facilitate continued service provision to affected populations by providing them, as well as the humanitarian actors supporting them, with the necessary connection. The ETC is awaiting the results of an analysis of humanitarian services in Sudan, coordinated by the Sudan AAP Working Group, which will help to map safe spaces, and their respective connectivity needs to move the project forward. The ETC is simultaneously engaging bilaterally with UN agencies and Non-

¹ Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency Support Team

Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to identify appropriate locations. This includes the IOM-managed location in Wadi Halfa which provides support to IDPs and was delayed in 2024.

In addition, the ETC is exploring the possibility of providing access to ETC networks for community volunteers working as part of the inter-agency Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) network. This aims to improve communication related to community feedback and referrals via the CFM hub.

On 26 March the ETC received inputs and data from nutrition cluster members (Save the Children, Relief International, and Islamic Relief Worldwide), regarding existing sites where services are being provided to affected populations, which outlined connectivity challenges that they have faced at each site. The ETC is currently reviewing the data to consider what steps can be taken to provide support to these safe sites if they are in a location where the ETC is operational. The ETC is developing an action plan to guide further implementation of S4C activities.

Funding

In 2025, the ETC requires approximately USD \$14 million to fully implement shared ICT services across Sudan in support of humanitarian operations in line with the Humanitarian Needs Response Plan.

So far in 2025, the ETC has received four percent of its required budget, having received a generous donation of US \$632,000 from the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In light of changing funding realities, the ETC is working on a revised budget in line with the HNRP reprioritization exercise. The ETC will finalize its amended budget by April 2025.

Challenges

Equipment shortages, access limitations, and restrictions on the importation and use of connectivity equipment continue to impact ETC's capacity to implement operations as planned.

The ETC has faced protracted issues gaining clearance for a large batch of connectivity equipment which arrived at Port Sudan in October 2024 and has since been held in customs. This has resulted in delays in expanding the ETC network to additional sites. While ETC continues to push for high-level advocacy from the UN to the authorities to encourage the release of this equipment, the ETC is also exploring local procurement and leveraging existing supplies within the humanitarian community.

Efforts to expand services into hard-to-reach areas, such as Darfur and Kordofan, have been constrained due to limited access, with international staff only able to conduct short missions to the Darfur region. In addition, the continued prohibition of the importation and use of Starlink devices in the western part of the country by the authorities in Port Sudan poses a major challenge for prospective ETC services in the region given that other forms of connectivity are not available.

Dashboard

The latest ETC Dashboard for the Sudan operation is available [here](#).

Meetings

A Global ETC Partners Teleconference took place on **04 March**. An ETC Sudan Working Group meeting took place on **19 March**.

All minutes are uploaded [here](#).

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Further information related to the ETC Sudan operation can be found on the website:
www.etcluster.org/emergency/sudan-conflict

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